

Good example of term paper on overall theme of the book

[Religion](#), [God](#)



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1 Samuel is one of the oldest documented writings and it belongs thematically with 2 Samuel. In some editions they are known as first two Books of the Kingdoms, thus leaving 1 and 2 Kingdoms as third and fourth books in this sequence. This is a very logical connection, since all the four books describe chronological events of the years preceding and following the establishment of the Jewish kingdom as an institution. Functionally 1 Samuel is a book of the Prophets (the other two being Law and Writings). This fact tells us that 1 Samuel is not only a historical book, describing certain actual events, but it also has the purpose to bring forward some religious knowledge to the readers. The overall aim of this book is to describe actual events by revealing Jehovah's presence and His decision making role in the subsequent circumstances.

The first few chapters of the book focus on biographical facts around the birth of Samuel and most importantly how he is dedicated to God by his

mother. From the fourth chapter on the focus is on historical events concerning the whole Hebrew nation – they lose a battle to the Philistines and, even though Samuel manages to give them back their independence, the impending problem of their national existence is there. In order to secure some unity against a vicious enemy, the Hebrews decide to choose a monarch, who will lead them into more successful battles in the future. Saul appears as the perfect king for the nation at first, but then his rule is doomed to decay (his story is contained in chapter 8 till ch. 15). The following chapters describe the lifestyle and gradual growing to maturity of the future Hebrew King, David. He is chosen by God, anointed by Samuel, abides with Saul for a while (ch. 14), defeats Goliath (ch. 15), forms a friendship with Saul's son Jonathan and finally distances himself from Saul (ch. 18 and ch. 19), ending up living as an outcast (ch. 29-ch. 30). There is a short reference to Saul's visit to a witch to see what the future brings for him. The book ends with the death of Saul.

Importance to Jews and Christians

It is common for all chronological storylines in the Old Testament to explain spiritual truths and to refer the readers to the reality of God's purposes and ideals about his chosen nation. 1 Samuel is viewed by scholars as a historical document, but also as a divinely inspired writing – by theologians. The latter see explanation on how certain events come to pass. The purpose of 1 Samuel is to show how sovereign God is in the midst of political insecurity and pressure. This book is a logical continuation of God's promise to bless the people of Israel in earlier Law literature of Old Testament (Deut. 28: 1-

14). It teaches them to regard God as the guiding force in all areas of their lives and to trust that He is the best leader for the nation.

In the covenant between God and Moses, the blessing for the nation of Israel is abundance of life in the promised land – fertile soil, peace, potential to rise against enemies and destroy them, power, strength and independence. The only condition to the nation of Israel is to honor God and to obey His commandments. 1 Samuel reminds of the covenant in a different time-frame through the prophet Samuel. The nation is reassured that each one individually has to have a clear conscience in front of God in order to thrive in His land.

For Christians this book has a key meaning, because it introduces David as a shepherd. David is a forerunner of Christ – in fact, in the New Testament Jesus is described as a direct descendant of David and biologically connected with him by being a continuation of David's bloodline, which makes Jesus literally a royal descendant. This fact is important for the New Covenant (New Testament), especially for all the gentiles that can be redeemed and adopted into God's holy nation through the blood of Jesus Christ, which He spilled on the cross.

Theories of Authorship

According to some scholars, the Talmud follows the tradition of considering Samuel for the author of chs. 1-24, Nathan and Gad – for authors of chs. 25-35 and 2 Samuel. However, practicing Rabbis are convinced that there were more authors involved in the creation of this chronicle. When one studies the text, it becomes evident that the writers were at least no contemporaries of

the described episodes. They were most probably recording a story that has been transferred from different sources. There were pre-texts of 1 Samuel in the form of compilations, original documentations and records. The author remains unknown. However, he must have had the right to use documentation with information about Samuel's, Saul's and David's lives. The stories were pre-recorded by scholars in different periods and sound "Deuteronomic" - with stress on moral examples and excellence. 1 Samuel's last compilation was probably revised by priests to make it sound more relevant.

Approximate Dating of the Writing

There is no exact date of the creation of this book. It is believed to have come into existence in the eight century B. C. and have been re-written in the seventh century B. C, but the book as we know it must have been created in the time after the Exile and was an object of numerous editions during this final stage of pre-arrangements.

Most believable theory of authorship and date

If the three figures of Samuel, Saul and David have existed, they might have been involved in the writing of the chronicle. Samuel was a priest and he must have had access to records and documentation. He also would have made sure that records were passed on to reliable persons, who would have taken a good care of them, since those stories were carriers of national identity. They might partially have been preserved verbally, partially contained in chronicles and records. There might have been a lack of lasting institutions and buildings (archives, libraries), due to wars, exile and other

practical hindrances, so it must have been a real challenge to keep records and rely on them as a source of information. More important is that 1 Samuel definitely is written within the spirit of rabbinic tradition. That is why it is a result of compilations and re-writing of Jewish priests in the time after the Babylonian exile.

Major Themes and Storylines

Samuel is the central figure of the first few chapters of the book, especially ch. 1-3. He is born as a divine answer of God after his barren mother Hannah had prayed fervently to the Lord in the temple in Jerusalem. Hannah's barrenness is in synchrony with the political and moral situation in the nation of Israel. Just as Hannah is mocked by women for her inability to bear children, the nation of Israel is weak and unable to win their battles against the Philistines constantly attacking them. Fortunately, God hears Hannah's prayer and gives her a child, which she dedicates to the Lord and leaves to grow in the temple. Thus God not only provides a heir to Hannah's husband, but a powerful new prophet, who will lead the nation of Israel to the next level, performing miracles and demonstrating God's love and faithfulness to His chosen people.

This double political and personal despair at the inability to overturn one's enemies brings forward God's answer in the person of Samuel. From an early age Samuel hears God's voice and is encouraged by the main priest in the temple of Jerusalem to follow God's calling. Even though Samuel's authentic spiritual gifting comes to replace the old priest and his corrupt sons, who defile the temple with their behavior, he is not hindered in his mission and

God is with him. It is not an accident that Hannah's pleading takes place in the heart of Israel - the temple of Jerusalem, where God meets with His people. God has seen the defilement of the next generation of priests to come and rescues the nation by giving them a priest from a different family and with pure intentions to serve the Lord. When God have laid the foundation with His people through Moses, He has said He would hold accountable the priest for the state of His people: He would look at the priest first and if he is defiled, then God will consider the whole nation corrupt; however, if the priest is pure and righteous in front of God by keeping His commandment, even though the nation might exhibit some moral failures, God will not punish them, because of the righteousness of the priest. Once the heart of the nation is purified (the temple and its priesthood) then the development of the nation and its institutions can be continued. " Samuel and Hannah represent how the process of rebuilding the faith of Israel will take its course."

In ch. 4-6 the reader's attention is drawn towards the Ark of the Covenant. Israel has been defeated by his enemies a few times and this is a sign that God has abandoned them. The Ark is temporarily removed from the Temple after the death of Eli (the priest preceding Samuel). However, the Ark is unfit to be placed anywhere else, because it causes troubles to foreign tribes that happen to host it. It is left to be protected for the following two decades in Kiriath Jearim, close to the land of Canaan. It will be back where it originally belongs only during the reign of David (2 Samuel). The Ark symbolizes the might and power of God and is directly associated with God's presence bringing victory and protection to his chosen people, but inflicting

destruction and sickness, when captured by the wrong people.

In ch. 7-12 the focus is on monarchy, which is one of the main themes of the book. Samuel (in ch. 7) proves to be a key figure - the last judge of the nation, who manages to successfully lead the Israelites in their fight against the enemies, demonstrating to his fellow citizens how a successful internal policy should work. In ch. 7 the people ask for a king to be appointed to them. This request stems from the elders of the community and adds fuel to the political tension. They express the desire to be like all the other nations around them in the hope to gain political and military strength to defeat their enemies: "Appoint for us a king to govern (= judge) us like all the nations" (ch. 8: 5). After the threat for outbreak of rebellion, God gives His permission to be appointed a king over Israel (ch. 8: 22). The elders of the country desire to be "like the other nations" - a monarchy involved in the administrative and legislative running of the country with strict regulation of the state, inherited by birth right.

God is specific that their king should be born Israelite, should not acquire too many processions and wives, in order to avoid being led astray and forgetting that he is equal with his fellow Israelites and in no way better. He should make a copy of the Law and read it to remember the Lord - this will grand him and his descendants a long reign (Deuteronomy 17: 14-20). If the model is taken from "other nations," there is a risk that God will not to be included in the process of pivotal decision making. Israel has to fight for its God-given identity as a chosen nation - to work with God and rely on Him for wisdom and intervention in politically difficult situations by constant seeking the will of God and His presence. This requires the intervention of priests and

prophets.

The theme of prophecy is the second most important theme in those few chapters, after the theme of kingship. Prophecy was instituted by Moses: “

The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your fellow Israelites. You must listen to him” (Deuteronomy 18: 15).

Samuel is a prophetic figure and has the task to keep his people safe, to give them directions and to impart wisdom by divine inspiration. The prophets are mediators of the “ word of God,” but they are not like Jesus, who is the “ Word became flesh.” Samuel helps Israel turn from a group of tribes into a monarchy. The prophet is to take an administrative position, making sure that the role of God is respected in all matters. The traditional basis for kingship is established earlier and documented in Exodus: “ The Lord shall reign for ever and ever” (Exodus 15: 18).

Samuel, just like any judge, takes responsibility for the whole nation of Israel. He functions alongside the kings and has the final word, representing God’s authority. The prophet serves as “ kingmaker and kingbreaker.” He secures the continuation of tradition, set in Judges, transmitting divine intervention in political affairs, while the institution of monarchy remains independent and focused on worldly dealings. It certainly provides a balance to a rising secular monarchy.

In chs. 9-12 the prophetic institution and monarchy are gradually reintegrated. The models of Saul’s anointing to be a king, followed by that of David, show what kind of person is suitable for the role of the covenant king of Israel. Saul comes to kingship by a godly intervention (ch. 9: 16), is approved by the prophet (ch. 10: 1), is given the right Spirit (ch. 10: 6-13)

and is proclaimed to be a king in front of the masses after a military triumph over the enemies of Israel (ch. 11). David goes through the same process of initiation into kingship - selection through God's direction (ch. 16: 1), Samuel prophesying about his future role and anointing him in front of witnesses (ch. 16: 13) and finally being covered with the Spirit to be a king over Israel (ch. 16: 14). The same Spirit is transitioned from Saul to David (ch. 16: 13) to underline that the role of a king is granted to only one person.

This picture makes the institution of kingship a divinely inspired one that has been released with power from above and is sacred. The person that is chosen and placed to be the king of Israel is holy. The fact that this process of initiation has taken place twice - for Saul and for David, makes the role of prophecy and prophetic intervention in kingdom affairs indispensable. Both themes of prophecy and kingship are interwoven and inseparable. The theme of the covenant is present all the time, since the prophet is a reminder of the covenant and executer of God's will. The model of the "ideal Kingship" is set by God.

Being a king is challenging for a random man who has not been trained in advance and certainly has never expected to be a king. Saul, paradoxically, has lost his donkey and has gone a long way to look for it, when Samuel, led by God, recognizes him as the future king. David, being a shepherd, comes home from the fields and Samuel, after having met all his older brothers in advance, is led by God to recognize David as a king.

This method makes God's standard for ruling the country of Israel very unique - there is a hint of God's looking after the heart of a person, not - his heritage, social status and training. The seemingly most random choices are

justified by God, because He knows how David loves the Lord, how he is ready to fulfill His commandments and how brave he is to stand for what is of God - namely the whole nation of Israel. Saul happens to misuse the institution of kingship by disobeying God and thus cutting the continuation of God's authority over Saul and his descendants. In ch. 11 he tries to "renew his kingdom," but his disobedience threatens to dethrone God from His kingship.

In ch. 12 Samuel assures the people that his ministry consists in observing the covenant and interceding for the nation. In ch. 13 Saul does not obey Samuel's order to wait for him. In ch. 15 the focus is on Saul's crime and everybody is convinced that Saul is no longer worthy of being a king - just as Samuel has prophesied. Both Saul and Samuel remain in power, however. The secular kingship is totally dependent on the prophet, despite the fact of being already established. Nevertheless, it is almost impossible for Saul to be removed from his position with ordinary means.

David's figure gains gradually more meaning in the coming chapters.

Between ch. 9 and ch. 15 Saul shows he is unsuitable to keep his kingship and David proves to have the right character to take over. David is anointed by Samuel in ch. 22 and ch. 23 reveals details about his early life as a shepherd and a child from a big family. In ch. 24 he faces Goliath and manages to defeat him with simple means, restoring the spirit of the Israeli army after an unpleasant challenge. Thereupon, he earns the right to marry Saul's daughter in ch. 25, but is confronted by Saul's outrage and hatred. Living close to Saul, David's life is in constant danger - Saul makes attempts to kill him (ch. 26).

However, not everyone in the king's palace is against David - he forms a hearty friendship with Saul's son Jonathan (ch. 27). Nevertheless, Saul's hostility would not diminish and David is forced to flee for his life: first to Nob and Gath (ch. 28), then to Adullam, Mizpeh and Hareth (ch. 29) and afterwards to Keilah, Ziph and Maon (ch. 30). Although being closely followed by Saul, David does not take the opportunity to kill Saul on two occasions and shows respect to him as the anointed king and God's chosen (ch. 31). David is a kind of a Messianic figure for the Israelites - he is anointed by God, has the favor of God and wins even more friends in the times of trials. He is a pre-figure of Jesus Christ, who even though persecuted by the Pharisees to be killed, wins the hearts of many outcasts seeking for righteousness.

Conclusion

Even though it would be interesting for us to know who and when exactly wrote 1 Samuel, the writers of the Old Testament were not obsessed with facts. They aim to describe spiritual truths about God's sovereign power. Despite the fact that the book is named after a prophet - Samuel, this might be the collective name for many prophets or clergy dealing with the writing and re-writing old documents. This makes the book a result of mutual efforts. The date is also irrelevant for this reason. More important is that it helps preserving the identity of the nation of Israel under God's covenant. 1 Samuel is also very important for Christians, because it tells the story of David, who is Jesus' predecessor. God promised to establish a king who will be powerful and whose reign will have no end. This promise refers to both David and Jesus Christ. God specifically prepares the coming of the Messiah

in a certain family, certain nation and certain timeframe. The forming of the nation of Israel over many generations and many trials prepared the minds of the Israelites to accept Jesus (partially) and to be able to spread the Gospel among the gentiles. In 1 Samuel we see another example of how God not only formed specific difficult circumstances to test His nation, but also provided powerful figures to point their way to freedom (through the prophet) and stability (through establishing the institution of kingship). If we apply the wisdom we receive from 1 Samuel to our situations and our times, we can see how problem and solution are interwoven and there is always hope out for us believers.

Both Christians and Jews can learn from this text a lot. We are witnessing that the State of Israel, established in the 20th century, still faces many political enemies. The question of the existence of Palestine (the former Philistine tribes) and the question about the territory of Israel need to be dealt with, because the political instability of Israel causes problems in many other countries in the West and in the Middle East.

If we learn something from 1 Samuel, it is that Israel was never meant to be a predominantly secular state and will always lose power, if not getting some wisdom from spiritual counselors. The Jews have to remain in the covenant of God, if they want to be God's representatives on earth. God has promised to help them and to deliver them from the hand of their numerous enemies, if they obey God and keep His commandments. They have to believe that their identity is in God and their protection comes from God.

The same applies to Christians - we have to keep our God-given identity in Christ and always put God first in times of trials. God will invariably provide

solutions in difficult times, when we pray to Him and listen to wise people, who are appointed by God to guide us and cover us with protections. We cannot be like “ everybody else around,” because we Christians, just as the nation of Israel, are chosen to be separate from the world and do God’s will. We are called to be in the world, but not of the world.

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